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SC fixes April 16 for hearing pleas against appointment of CEC, ECs

NEW DELHI: Supreme Court on Wednesday fixed April 16 for hearing pleas challenging the appointment of chief election commissioner and election commissioners under the 2023 law. The court fixed the date after advocate Prashant Bhushan said the matter is listed at number 38 and is not likely to reach for hearing during the day

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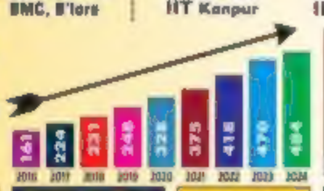

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Punjab Police evict protesting farmers

Leaders Dallewal and Pandher detained in Mohali; cops clear Khanauri & Shambhu, raze stages, pull down tents

HARPREET BAJWA @ Chandigarh

IN a dramatic operation, the Punjab Police on Wednesday evicted all protesting farmers from the Shambhu and Khanauri border with Haryana shortly after detaining their leadership in Mohali.

The drama began in the evening when Kisan Mazdoor Morcha and Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non Political) leaders Sarwan Singh Pandher and Jagjit Singh Dallewal entered Mohali enroute to Khanauri following another inconclusive round of talks with the Centre at Chandigarh.

The Punjab Police detained them when they reached the Jagatpura area of Mohali. Dallewal has been on a hunger strike since November last year.

Dallewal was taken into custody while inside his ambulance, while others were detained along with their vehicles after some resistance.

Pandher was detained at the Zirakpur barrier as he attempted to flee. Fourteen farmer leaders and others accompanying the two were also detained.

Pandher has been taken to the Bahadurgarh Fort Commando Police Training Centre in Patiala. It has been transformed into a makeshift detention centre, as a majority of farmer leaders and protesting farm women, except Dallewal, are being lodged there.

After detaining the leaders, the police force led by senior officers reached both border points and evicted the farmers there. They were first requested to clear the area and sit in vehicles arranged by the police. At Khanauri, a little force was used for eviction. Then, JCBs were deployed to pull down the makeshift stage and other structures, including tents. The tractor-trolleys parked by farmers were taken away. The clearing operation is expected to last through the night.

Around 300 farmers were detained at Khanauri and Shambhu during the operations.

Internet service was suspended in many areas around the Shambhu border amid heavy police deployment in the nearby villages.

The decision to take action was reportedly made on Tuesday night, following a meeting between top AAP functionaries and industrialists. The industrialists said that they were incurring significant cost mark-ups because of the protests.

Deputy Inspector of Police (Patiala Range) Mandeep Singh Sidhu, who was at the Khanauri border and Senior Superintendent of Police of Patiala, Nanak Singh, who was at Shambhu, said that the farmers were requested to cooperate in clearing the roads.

"Those who were willing to leave for their native places were sent away. The police are clearing the roads and dismantling the makeshift structures," said Singh.

The officers said thet are in touch with their Haryana counterparts to clear the blockades on their side so as to open the roads for unhindered traffic movement.

Protest began on Feb 13, '24

The protesting farmers had been camping at the Shambhu and Khanauri border points between Punjab and Haryana since February 13 last year when their march to Delhi was thwarted by security forces

Important for growth: AAP govt

Punjab finance minister Harpal Singh Cheema said the step was necessitated for the economic growth of the state. "It is important that we fight against unemployment too," he added

Opposition raps police action

Union minister of state for railways Ravneet Bittu condemned the crackdown. Former chief minister Charanjit Singh Channi said the AAP govt succumbed to pressure from the Centre and took action against the farmers

The Punjab Police remove a temporary structure put up by farmers at the Punjab-Haryana Shambhu border where they were sitting in a protest over various demands, on Wednesday | ANI

Joy all around as Sunita is back

NASA astronaut Sunita Williams being helped out of SpaceX Dragon spacecraft after splashing down off the coast of Florida on Wednesday | KEEGAN BARBER/NASA VIA AP/PTI

DILIP SINGH KSHATRIYA @ Ahmedabad

NASA astronauts Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore, stranded on the International Space Station for nine months after their spacecraft developed serious technical glitches, finally returned to Earth in the wee hours on Wednesday.

The SpaceX Crew Dragon spaceship carrying the two made a successful splashdown off the Florida coast on Tuesday at 5:57 pm (local time).

Williams (59), an Indian-American with roots in Gujarat, and Wilmore (62) had set off for the ISS onboard a Boeing Starliner on June 5, 2024 for an eight-day mission. However, the spacecraft encountered technical problems, compromising its ability to bring the astronauts back safely.

As the news of their safe return spread, celebrations erupted in Williams' ancestral village Jhulasan in Gujarat's Mehsana district. Residents gathered at the village temple on Wednesday morning to watch the live broadcast. The moment the SpaceX capsule splashed down off the Florida coast, the villagers burst crackers, danced, and chanted *Har Har Mahadeva* in sheer joy. An *akhand jyot* (eternal flame) had been burning at the village temple since she left for space over nine months ago. Sunita's cousin Navin Pandya shared that a grand procession is planned in her honour in Jhulasan," he said.

CM, RSS try to tamp down Maha tension

SUDHIR SURYAWANSHI @ New Delhi

TWO days after communal riots in Nagpur, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis asked his party's ministers to restrain from making unwanted comments that would disturb harmony. Controversial minister Nitesh Rane, too, was asked to tone down his rhetoric, sources said.

In Bengaluru, RSS spokesperson Sunil Ambedkar said the Aurangzeb tomb controversy is not relevant today, adding the RSS does not support any kind of violence as it was not good for the society.

On Monday, 35 police personnel, including three deputy commissioners of police, and five civilians were injured in communal riots in Nagpur.

Opposition leaders have welcomed the stand taken by Fadnavis. "Nitesh Rane has had tacit support from the upper leadership, so he has been making provocative statements. No action was taken against him. It is high time action is taken against such ministers and set an example," said Congress leader Vijay Wadettiwar.

BJP MLA Sudhir Mungatiwar said violence was not good for a healthy society, adding the Nagpur violence had been an unfortunate reaction to Samajwadi Party MLA Abu Azmi praising Mughal emperor Aurangzeb.

K'taka resolution against Centre's Waqf Bill

Bengaluru: The Karnataka Assembly on Wednesday adopted a resolution rejecting the Centre's proposed Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2024. It insisted that the Centre immediately withdraw the Bill as it contains provisions that violate the fundamental principles of the Constitution | FULL STORY: P4

36p/ unit extra surcharge on power consumers from April 1

BOSKY KHANNA @ Bengaluru

FROM April 1, electricity consumers will have to cough up an additional 36 paise per unit as surcharge in their bills towards government employees' pension and gratuity for the financial year 2025-26.

The Karnataka Electricity Regulatory Commission (KERC) on Wednesday issued an order allowing energy supply companies (ESCOMS) to recover the government's share of pension and gratuity (P&G) contributions from consumers.

The P&G contributions will be revised for 2026-27 and 2027-28, where consumers will pay 35 paise and 34 paise, respectively. CONTINUED ON P5

DKS: It is a state subject, will rename R'gara as B'luru South

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

EVEN as the Centre reportedly rejected the state government's proposal to rename Ramanagara as Bengaluru South district, DyCM and Bengaluru Development Minister DK Shivakumar said that his government will get it done as it is a state subject. Shivakumar, who represents Kanakapura, which is part of Ramanagara district, in the Assembly, initiated the process in July last and submitted a memorandum to CM Siddaramaiah to rename Ramanagara as Bengaluru South district. The state cabinet approved a proposal the same month.

Shivakumar told reporters in New Delhi that renaming districts is a state subject. CONTINUED ON P4

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